# livingCity

3 1983 VOLUME 22 MARCH

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IT IS LOVE THAT COUNTS
by CHIARA LUBICH

A STRUGGLE FOR SANCTITY
THE STORY OF MARIA GABRIELLA, A TRAPPIST NUN

EXPERIENCES OF LIFE IN THE FAMILY

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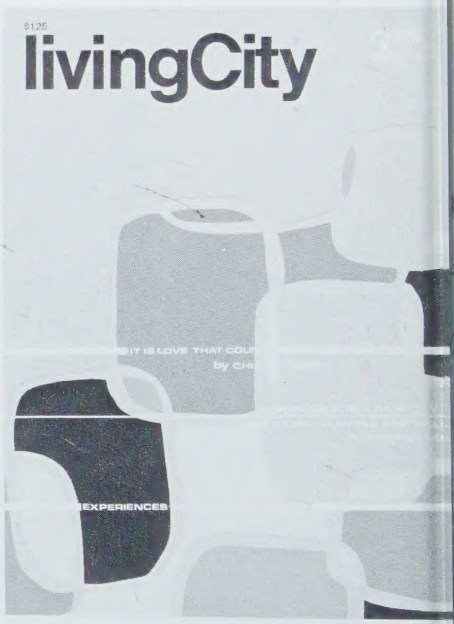


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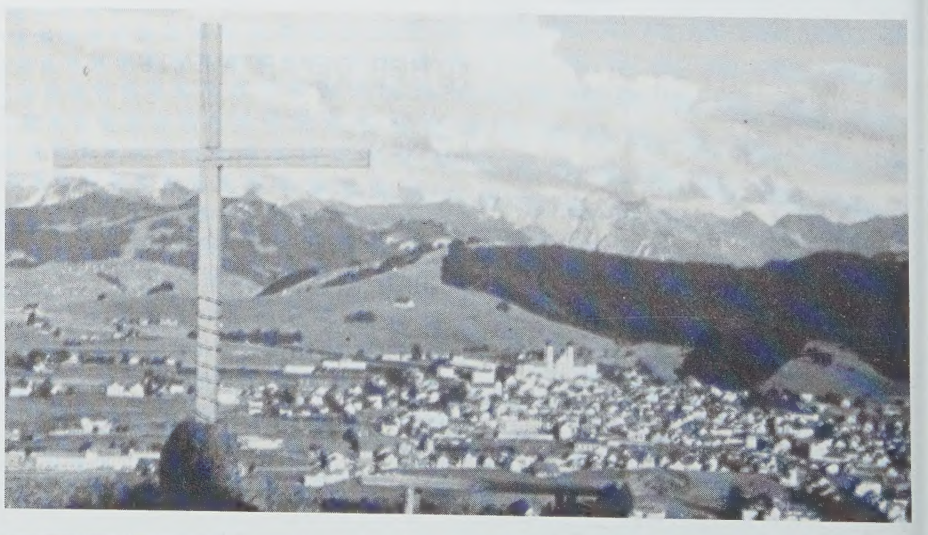
# in the Swiss UNITY MOSAIC

by ANNAMARIA PERICOLI

*In its Constitution, this country is defined as a "union of peoples." The effort to reach this goal is an ongoing one, and the Focolare Movement would like to give a contribution to it by bearing witness to evangelical unity.*

As I started my visit to Switzerland I told myself I would not let my encounter with this country, or better, with the Swiss people, be influenced by the usual stereotypes: watches, chocolates, photographic landscapes on a calendar, or banks. . . . Nor did I want to limit myself to considering things like the punctuality of the Swiss, their reliability, their meticulousness. I found however countless examples of these traits: in the way pedestrians stop before a red light also when the entire street is deserted, in the extremely detailed instructions you find for everything or the harmonious way in which old and new are combined. One can see this blend in the gray-green sandstone houses which are found in all Swiss cities, and decorated with flower pots or window boxes overflowing with red geraniums, as well as with the multicolored banners of the city.

On Rathangasse Street right outside my window, a neighborhood party recently lasted into the wee hours. There were tables overloaded with food, card games, music and voices coming from people of all ages. The Swiss worker, very precise and reserved, as his reputation requires, manages to make up for it abundantly with a full calendar of similar traditional celebrations which originated centuries back. The whole history of



ABOVE: Einsiedeln. The Benedictine Abbey, standing in full relief in the valley, has given concrete witness through the centuries to the "work and pray" of Saint Benedict. It was observing this landscape very closely that the idea of permanent Mariapolises[1] came to life. They would have to be "mini-cities," similar in every way to ordinary cities, with schools and industries. Each house then would have to be built in harmony with all the others, as a fruit of mutual love among the inhabitants. A city, therefore, that could bear witness to our ideal: God-Love, even if empty.

this nation is imbued with the two-fold enjoyment and need of "being together." In its Constitution, Switzerland is defined as "a union of the peoples of the 23 sovereign Cantons of the Swiss confederation." In reality there are 26 Swiss states, because three Cantons are divided into two. Switzerland has four official languages, two main Churches (numerically about equal), and countless cultures.

About one million of the just over six million inhabitants of Switzerland are foreigners and in addition, each Canton and city has its own history and autonomy. But for seven centuries the Helvetic Agreement has united the Swiss people in spite of the differences which separate them.

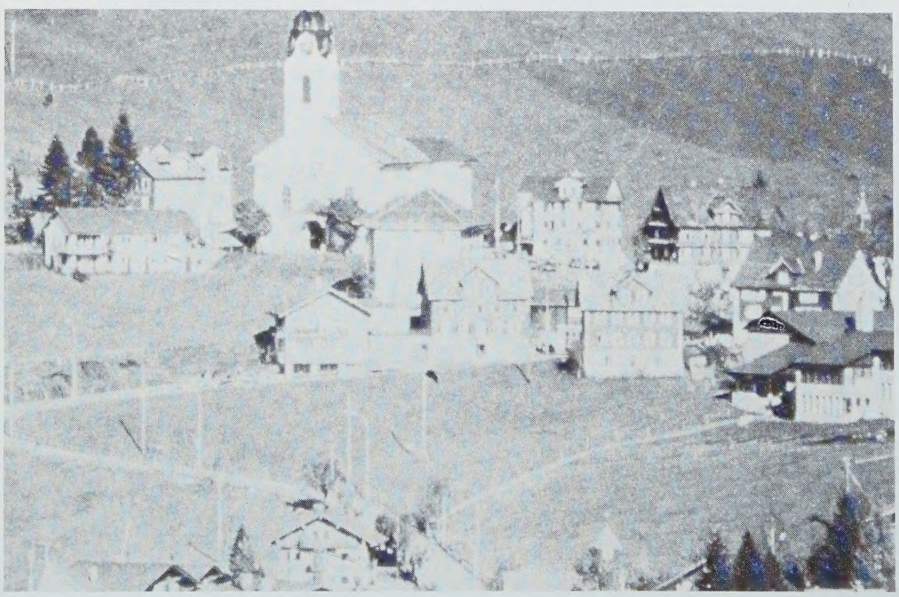
Gottfried Keller, the well-known Swiss poet and novelist, writes, "How consoling it is that there is not just one type of Swiss person, but rather people from Zurich, people from Bern.... Appenzell has its own history and Geneva

ABOVE: Andor Hertelendy, a married "focolarino[2]" with Herman Wagenhofer, a "volunteer[3]" from Zurich during a break from work at "Unity" Center in Baar. Andor is an engineer of Hungarian origin. His family, like many others, left Hungary after the famous events of 1956. One detail that brings us back to the characteristic of the Swiss nation is that since the last century it has sheltered also illustrious refugees, such as Bakunin, Mazzini, Garibaldi, Richard Wagner and Einstein. It is true that the country of Henry Dunant, Genevan, who had the idea of solidarity among nations, founding the Red Cross, knows also the contradictions of an extreme self-protection which at times risks fear or hatred of foreigners. But it merits directing attention to the first dimension: to the thrust towards collaboration among nations. The Swiss Focolare Movement — certainly not made of rich people — has for several years assumed the weight of responsibility for the situation of extreme need among the Movement's Lebanese community which lost everything during the destruction and forced exoduses. It has also a certain kind of supportive relationship with the Philippine community.

BELOW: Panorama of Montet, in the suburbs of Fribourg. Here the Movement's "Center of Formation" was born with the generous contribution of the entire Swiss Focolare community. It is an international center where everyone wants to live unity based on the Gospel. At a recent inauguration there were present about fifty religious and civil personalities among whom were Bishop Mamie, Catholic Bishop of Fribourg, Dr. Lukas Vischer, Moderator of the Department of Theology of the Reformed Alliance of the World, and the presidents of the Synods of the Reformed Churches of the Districts of Fribourg, Lausanne and Neuchâtel. The latter, Rev. De Montmollin, making reference also to the deeds of the Movement, said, "We have no right to be discouraged regarding the progress of ecumenism."

LEFT: Fribourg 1960: a moment during the international Mariapolis, in which the idea of unity among all peoples was especially emphasized.

BELOW: Oberiberg, a little center in the Canton of Schwyz. Every one of these houses holds many memories for those of us in the Movement. Here, examining the writings of St. Teresa of Avila on the various stages of her spirituality we considered how ours — a collective spirituality, new and still young — could have a perfect model in the Virgin Mary. Meditating, in fact, on the events of her life just as the Gospel relates them to us, we saw them as ideal stages for our life also: joyous stages, sorrowful and glorious stages along a direct way, a way of ever more perfect love. The Swiss cottages, in harmony with the splendid natural surroundings, outlined for us some details concerning mode of dress — "like the lilies of the field" — and the residence of the Focolarini, their houses would have to be such as to put all visitors at ease: the poor who should feel comfortable there, and the rich who should not feel rejected.



has its own as well. Diversity in unity, may God guard it for us. It is the true school of friendships. When political solidarity becomes personal friendship among the people of an entire nation we have reached the apex."

**It was here in Fribourg,** Switzerland, in the small auditorium of Christ the King Church, that one of the great prospects of the Focolare Movement became tangible in the year 1960. The world was then living an extraordinary moment. It was marked by the beginning of a thaw in East-West relations. The Olympics taking place in Rome were throwing the iron curtain ajar. And that same year, after announcing the ecumenical Council, Pope John XXIII had created the Secretariat for Christian Unity.

"Unity," this word which is so basic to the Focolare Movement and which was so suspect in the public opinion of that time, because it was a word used then almost exclusively by communists, was becoming "the" word at that moment in history.

*(continued on page 6)*

RIGHT: The representatives of the Catholic Church, of the Orthodox Church, of the Old Catholic and the Reformed Churches participated in the inauguration of the "Unity" Center at Baar. Present here was Chiara Lubich who in various ways has contributed to ecumenism in Switzerland. In the photo: the blessing of the Center, given by Metropolitan Emilianos, by Bishop Hanggi of Basel and by the Reverend Jakob Frey. Director of the Center for Formation of the Reformed Church of Zurich.

BELOW LEFT: The "Unity" Center at Baar, in the suburbs of Zug, came into being in 1976 with the joint efforts of the entire Swiss community. Here, where the artisan professions still enjoy great favor, everybody was able to help adding that touch of homey warmth so typical of Swiss houses.

RIGHT: "Among the Swiss people there is such tactfulness, humility, reliability, such intelligent and constant charity where the right hand doesn't know what the left hand does, " says Chiara Lubich.

*(continued from page 4)*

The flag displaying 12 stars against a blue background, which had just been designed for the countries aspiring to a united Europe, foretold a turning point in the relationship between Europe and the rest of the world. A centuries-old political dream was becoming a reality.

The seed of the Focolare Movement which had started in 1943 had rapidly taken root in many cities throughout central Europe and Fribourg was chosen as the meeting place for the Movement's annual summer gathering. In addition to the Europeans in attendance, some Brazilians were present and a few students from central Africa.

This gathering offered the participants not only a spirituality of unity but also valid experiences of its application in various fields of human endeavor showing that a united world was possible. At the 1959 Mariapolis in Fiera di Primiero in northern Italy, people speaking nine different languages had committed themselves to living for unity in their own lands so that the whole world would become one "Mariapolis." The following summer in Fribourg, the participants foresaw the possibility of accomplishing unity among all peoples through the life of the Gospel. They made a pact to build this unity by going beyond every obstacle, until it would be accomplished among all in the world. The society resulting from this would be enriched by the sharing of everyone's talent.

That experience gave birth to a so-called "declaration" of mutual love lived out to the fullest. It said, "Let's learn to be hospitable and hard-working like the Swiss; ardent and childlike like the Brazilians; strong and persevering like the Dutch; clever and harmonious like the Italians; organized and practical like the Germans; discerning and gentle like the French; dignified and industrious like the Belgians; joyful and faithful like the Spanish; sensitive and tenacious like the Slavic peoples. . . loving, luminous and perfect, because we are the people of God."

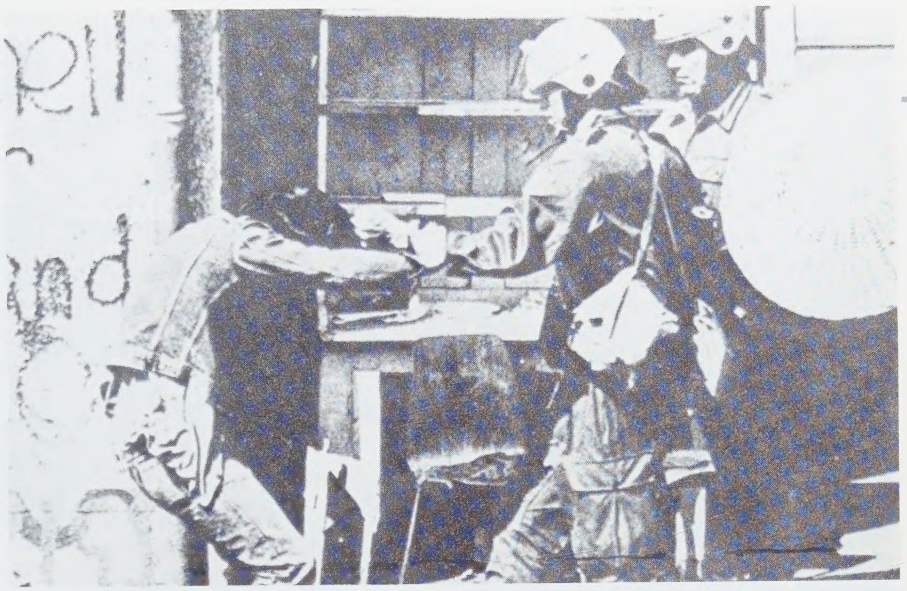
**Nicola of Flüe, patron saint of Switzerland, "Father of the Country." For the members of the Movement, he is a great example, having combined in himself two distinct characteristics, that of a very committed Christian layman, and that of a contemplative. Father of ten children, peasant, soldier, politician and magistrate, he retired as a hermit on the outskirts of his estate. Immersed in contemplation, he remained open to all the problems of life. Poor people as well as statesmen and ecclesiastics rushed to him, seeking advice. Three times he left the hermitage for the sake of his countries peace when it was threatened by enemies or internal struggles. The Pact of Stans (1481), attributed to his intervention, may be considered the first constitutional statute of Switzerland; it gave supremacy to the idea of one country, overcoming subdivisional particularism. It was a far-sighted idea that opened up possibilities for a peaceful alliance among the nations of Europe.**

In November of 1960, the long-awaited first Focolare Center in Switzerland was opened in Zurich. A Focolare community had already come to life in various Cantons, and a few months earlier the first big meeting of the Movement had taken place in the parish center of Herrliberg in the Canton of Zurich. Three hundred people, including thirty-five priests and religious, were present. Among the many parishoners who generously provided accomodations for the members of the Movement were seventy families belonging to the Reformed Church. On that occasion the writer Alfonso Rosenberg commented, "You have given us the opportunity to take part in the dawn of a world filled with light. Everything that you have brought us is so simple, so believable and so true, that it touches our hearts and gives us the hope and certainty that it will all come to pass."

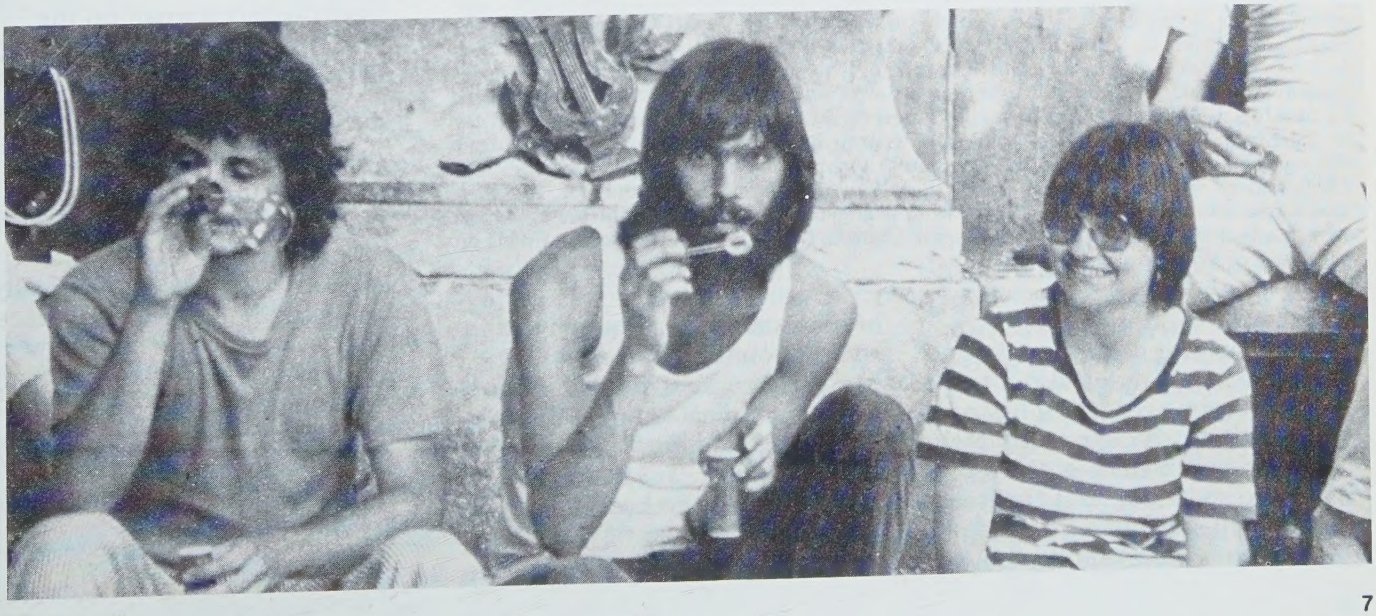
In 1955, a Swiss architect of the Reformed Church, Hans Brutsch from Schaffhausen, came in contact with the Focolare Movement in Milan and brought word of it back to his city. He recalls, "On a construction site I met a man who told me that he belonged to the Focolare Movement. I was immediately very interested in it and often we would talk about it late into the night. In 1955, I took part in a Mariapolis in the Dolomite Mountains where I met Chiara Lubich and her first companions. This meeting was of utmost importance for my life. At that time, all the focolarini were Catholic and

therefore it was inevitable that a certain question should come to my mind: 'How can I remain in contact with you?' I had the distinct impression that these people had an authentically evangelical way of thinking."

In Ramsen, in a Canton of Schaffhausen he shared his experience with a couple of friends. Together they sent a postcard to the focolarini of Milan inviting them to come to Ramsen. At Christmas time, a focolarino went to visit them for a few days. The circle of those interested in the Movement soon widened from Schaffhausen to Winterthur, and then to Zurich. From Ramsen, the Focolare spirituality spread to Darmstadt in West Germany where it was welcomed by the Marienschwestern, a community of evangelical Lutheran deaconesses. Their foundress Mother Basilea accompanied a group of them to the 1959 Mariapolis in Fiera di Primiero. It was a decisive moment for the Movement, marking the beginning of those ecumenical contacts which would develop extensively from 1961 on. It was in 1961, in fact, that Chiara Lubich



ZURICH 1980: Exploding violently is the young people's protest which will be prolonged for months and is not yet over. Bahnhofstrasse — the street of banks — is transformed into a real battle ground. The police react in a full show of force. On December 12 a girl burned herself alive, leaving a message of desperate loneliness. Can this possibly be the deepest outcry of a youth who on the one hand split shop windows and on the other, tie delicate balloons on the barbed-wire in which they are enclosed? The cleft between the State's demand for order and the young people's demand for freedom seems irremediable. The pastors of Zurich, who are united beyond the religious frontiers, intervene publicly to seek a solution. During that Christmas of 1980 the gen[4] of Zurich, and the other Christian youths find themselves in the "Red Factory," occupied by the challengers. For several days, they will be involved in a search for communication and reconciliation among these their contemporaries who, in addition to the wounds from the calshes, also carry within themselves wounds of hatred and delusion. It is a search for dialogue which continues still, after that dramatic period, by means of "actions" which involve youths and adults in experiences of peace, friendship, pardon. Recently the gen sponsored a Festival in the Zurich central park. Participating in it were youths of all types who enjoyed "an extraordinary and peaceful day."



The family of Peter and Helen Dettwiller. He is the rector of a Reformed Church at Baar. Like many other members of the Reformed Church they have welcomed the spirituality of the Movement. The Switzerland of the religious wars between Catholics and members of the Reformed Church is certainly in the past. Not only the one of the ferocious struggles during the times of Zwingli, with the rigid division of Catholic and Reformed districts and Cantons, spiritually and geographically impassable, but also far away by this time is the Switzerland of hostility among neighbors, of different creeds. With increasing rhythm — at the end of 1948, with the constitutional changes regarding freedom of residence, and even more after the second world war — displacements on account of work and urbanization created a strong mingling of persons with diverse religious persuasions. Quite revealing is the number of mixed marriages. So Christianity in Switzerland exists in a typically ecumenical situation. Especially the young people who have not lived through the old struggles, are finding it difficult to understand why Christians are separated. The spontaneous ecumenical actions which originate in the parish Churches are more and more numerous. And this action at a grass-root level binds the various Churches to a cooperation, even on the official plane. The joint research work of the commissions on dialogue aims at "dispelling the misunderstandings among the Churches, to develop a closer cooperation on common problems, and to bear witness together to faithfulness to the Gospel," as it is written in the documents. In this context the ecumenical dimension of the Focolare Movement offers a line for Catholics and Christians of the Reformation who adhere to it: to listen to one another, to get to know one another in greater depth, to re-evangelize themselves in mutual Christian love, each remaining faithful to his own Church, rediscovering the richness of it on the basis of common baptism.

was invited to address the Marienschwestern community in Germany at a meeting also attended by several evangelical pastors.

Meanwhile, through completely different circumstances, the Movement spread throughout the Italian and French sectors of Switzerland. In Lugano, a Jesuit spoke about the spirituality to a young woman during a retreat. After spending two days at a Mariapolis, this woman communicated her enthusiasm about the Movement to her colleagues at work. In 1958, an Italian couple who had moved to Switzerland because of the husband's job as a nuclear engineer, invited the focolarini to come to Geneva from the nearest Focolare Center in Grenoble, France.

Consequently, by 1960, the time had come to open a Focolare Center in Zurich as well. Two focolarini arrived from Italy driving an old compact. They brought with them only their personal belongings, and the Swiss community provided everything else that they would need, even jobs.

**In Payerne, Switzerland in 1982,** 25 years after the architect from Schaffhausen was instrumental in bringing the Focolare spirituality to Switzerland, the Swiss Focolare community presented the *Focolare Fest.* It was a beautiful display of unity exhibiting the richness of expressions, vocations, achievements of the Movement in today's Switzerland.

Chiara Lubich spoke there of the supernatural, concrete and against-the-current "technique" of unity. She presented anew a goal which seems to have a natural continuity with the historical make-up of this nation, created as a "union of peoples — namely, to spread unity, to spread the "civilization of love."

"Switzerland is small on the one hand yet known throughout the world for many human values which are typically Swiss," she said. "This nation which is so hospitable, so historically rich, which was founded on God's name, is suitable for the Christian experiment I mentioned (. . . ) exactly because it is geographically small. (Suitable to become a place) where those who want to know what authentic Christianity is, may find it, and those who want to know where authentic is in progress, may see it. If the Risen Lord in here with us, everything is possible."

*1,2,3,4) See inside back cover.*

# "Open wide your hands"

*The message of Pope John Paul II to the Universal Church for the season of Lent*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

*"And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need"* (Acts 2:44-45).

These words of Saint Luke echo vividly in my heart at this time when we are preparing to celebrate once more the liturgical season of Lent. These are precious weeks offered by the Church to all Christians, in order to help them to reflect upon their profound identity as children of the heavenly Father and as brothers and sisters of all human beings. It is also meant to help them find a renewed enthusiasm for sharing in a practical and generous way, for God himself has called us to base our lives upon charity.

Our relationships with our neighbor are therefore of prime importance. And when I use the word "neighbor," I obviously mean the people living side by side with us, in our families, where we live, in our village or town. But it is just as much a matter of the people whom we meet at work, and people who are suffering or sick, or lonely or really poor. My neighbor also includes those who are geographically very far away, or who are exiled from their own country, or who are without work, food and clothes, and often without freedom. My neighbor includes all those people who have suffered and have been almost or completely ruined by unforseeable and tragic catastrophes, which have plunged them into physical and moral misery, and also in many cases into the grief of losing those most dear to them.

Lent is really an earnest appeal from the Lord to undertake inner renewal, both personal and community: renewal in prayer and a return to the sacraments, but equally through the manifestation of charity, by the personal and collective sacrificing of time, money and resources of all sorts, so as to meet the needs and the distress of our brothers and sisters throughout the world. Sharing is a duty that cannot be shirked by any people of good will, least of all the disciples of Christ. There are many possible forms of sharing, ranging from voluntary work in which one offers one's services with a spontaneity worthy of the Gospel, from generous and even repeated offerings from our surplus and sometimes even from what we ourselves need, to offering work to the unemployed or to those who are giving up all hope.

Finally this Lent of the year 1983 will be a special grace for it will coincide with the opening of the Holy Year of the Redemption. This is an event that can deeply stimulate the lives of Christians, so that they correspond still more closely to the divine calling which is theirs: to become children of God and true brothers and sisters of all, after the model of Christ.

On the day of the Solemn Inauguration of my Pontificate, I said: "Open wide all your doors to Christ!" And today I say to you: Open wide your hands in order to really give all you can to your needy brothers and sisters! Do not be afraid! Each and every one of you, be new and untiring dispensers of the Charity of Christ.

# A struggle for sanctity

by GINO LUBICH

*The ideal of ecumenism changed Maria Segheddu from a quarrelsome and rebellious Sardinian girl to a little saint, Sister Gabriella of Unity. The rite of her beatification took place on January 25, 1983 in the Basilica of Saint Paul Outside the Walls, in Rome. It was the closing event of this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.*

All the people of Dorgali, family members, friends and acquaintances agree on one thing when talking about Maria (or Mau'as she was called) and her personality. Even with the differences in details and emphasis according to the various personal experiences, the verdict is practically unanimous: she had a harsh, abrasive temperament. This does not mean that she wouldn't also be remembered for traits of exquisite sensitivity and moments of generosity and dedication during her childhood. It does remain true, however, that the emphasis of all testimonies about her, point primarily to her obstinate, bad temper, to her critical, contentious spirit and her rebellious flare-ups.

The fifth of eight children, Maria Segheddu, was born on March 18, 1914 in the small town of Dorgali in Sardinia. Her father, Marcantonio, a shepherd, died when she was only 12 years old, and it fell to her mother Caterina, known as "Zi' Chucchedda," to take the reins of the family. She was a strong woman, but not strong enough to subdue the indomitable stubbornness of Mau'.

One day Mau's mother asked her to empty a bucketful of potato peels outside, in her father's sheep pasture, but the girl refused. In a sterner tone of command, the mother repeated the order several times. Nothing. The mother finally spanked her, put the bucket into Mau's hands and pushed her to the spot where it was to be emptied, and left. The girl just kept sitting there, sulking. A half an hour later she came back, holding the borders of her apron together. Then, as she came closer to her mother, she opened the apron and dropped all the potato peels she had been holding therein, right on the floor.

In school, too, she always got the upper hand. She had entered school at the age of six, a very bright child, particularly gifted in arithmetic. One morning, Mr. Moledda, the teacher, called a boy, Cucca, to the blackboard and gave him a mathematical problem to solve. The boy worked out a solution and the teacher seemed satisfied. But not Mau'. Immedi-

*The old and now abandoned Trappist Abbey of Grottaferrata. Its energetic Abbess, Mother Pia, brought to this modest monastic community a gust of strength, traditional and prophetic at the same time. In 1957 the abbey was transferred to Vitorchiano where the community today is twice as large as it was in the time of Sister Gabriella. Two more abbeys were founded since, one in Tuscany and one in Argentina.*

ately she jumped up protesting, "So you think it was done okay, this problem?" she shouted. Irritated, the teacher retorted, "If you don't think it's okay, why don't you come up and do it yourself!" Without waiting to be told twice, the girl dashed to the blackboard, took the chalk and put down the right solution, one two three.

With her polemical mind, she wouldn't let anybody get away with anything. She didn't even shy away from strong words when she thought the situation demanded them.

Mau' wasn't too fond of going to Church either. Yes, she did go to Mass on Sunday, but when the bells called for evening service, she preferred to stay home to play cards or bingo. "You go," she would tell her mother, and if the mother insisted, she would stamp her feet screaming, "Leave me alone, I want to play." Then she would get terribly mad if she didn't win.

As the years went by, she became more and more taken by her passion for reading. Once she started reading a book, she couldn't put it down. She kept devouring it until her mother blew out the candle and forced her to go to bed.

Strong and healthy, Mau' was an indefatigable worker. Once, in midwinter, she wanted to do the laundry at all costs. Since the laundry was done at the river, she broke the ice and scrubbed the sheets with all her might, without paying any attention to her half frozen hands. She was good at sewing, embroidering and weaving as well.

In spite of her rough temper, all around her felt intuitively that underneath that tough crust there was great generosity of soul. It was enough to see her coming home from the river when, without saying a word, she would try to lighten the burden of the other girls by taking some laundry pieces out of their baskets and by carrying them herself, in addition to balancing her own over-loaded basket on the top of her head. Someone even asked her, once, "Why don't you join Catholic Action?" But she answered dryly, "One must respect it" which meant that if one entered, one had to be fully committed, which frankly, she didn't feel like being at the time.

But she did feel like it, spontaneously, by the time she was eighteen. "I didn't see the necessity for it before," she explained. But now she did see it. She registered with Catholic Action and acted accordingly. Now she understood the importance of prayer, and became noted for her spirit of piety. She went to communion and did her meditation every day. Her mother, who had scolded her for not going to Church, now reprimanded her for staying there too long.

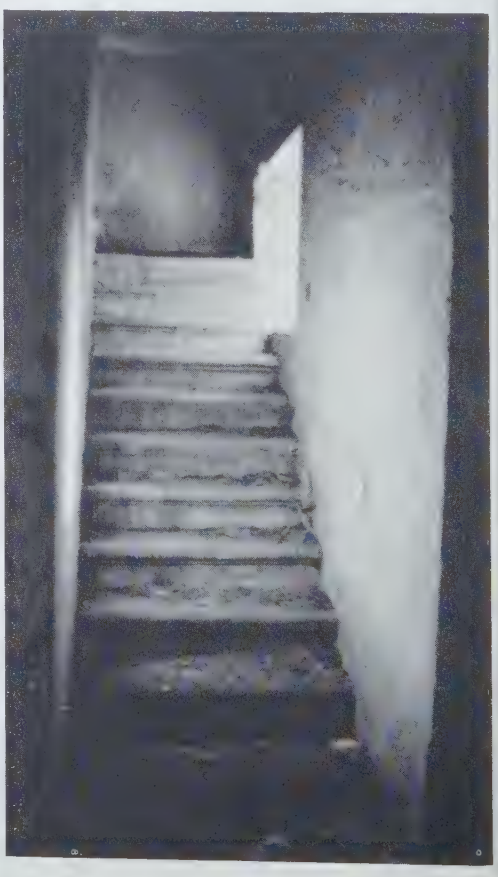
Mau' continuously refined her generosity in charity, and forced her own temperament, still somewhat on the abrasive side, to change. She became patient and constant, to the point of taking care of a cancer patient who was shunned by everybody else because of her unbearable attitude. She taught catechism, but with a stick at hand. One day, Father Meloni, the assistant pastor, made it disappear from the classroom, leaving the following note in its place: "Arm yourself with patience, not with a stick." Mau' did not react. It was another victory over self.

A few of her friends entered religious orders. One of them, Marras, joined the Trappist Sisters of Grottaferrata. Mau' took her time to think it over. At the age of 21 she went to see Father Meloni and told him, "I feel that the Lord is calling me." "Where do you want to go?" "Wherever you want." "Would you like to go to a Trappist monastery?" "Yes." She didn't even know exactly what a Trappist monastery was, but she wanted to do the will of God. "Do you want to go to Grottaferrata?" She didn't even know where that was. She had never left her island of Sardinia, not even the surrounding area of Dorgali. Her longest trip, a pilgrimage to Our Lady of the Miracle at Bitti, had been taken on foot fifty kilometers one way, fifty to return. "Send me wherever you want."

And so she went to Grottaferrata. The date was September 30, 1935. To receive her in the parlor there was Mother Pia, the Abbess, and another nun who had just come in from the orchard. At a glance, Mau' noticed that the latter had been gathering walnuts; her hands were all black. "What a joy, Reverend Mother," she exclaimed. "I like this very much! Because outside they say that nuns aren't doing anything, but I see that they are working, and I'm happy!"

Mau' now Sister Gabriella, worked, worked, and how she worked — digging, hoeing, carrying heavy loads, pulling weeds, cleaning floors, restoring books in

*It was on this staircase, in the Trappist Abbey of Grottaferrata, that a nun first noticed that Sister Gabriella was seriously ill. She saw her standing on one of the steps, leaning against the wall to catch her breath, and shaking uncontrollably as she coughed. "I made a move to help her, but she only smiled sweetly and made a sign indicating 'no' with her head. She then picked up her heavy bucket with one hand, her broom and mop with the other and, thanking me in the customary Cistercian way, she went on climbing the stairs."*



the bindery, and even trying to train her voice (which was off tune) for the choir.

"To me, entering the convent and becoming perfect were the same thing," she wrote a year later to her family in Dorgali. "But now I know from experience that it isn't so. Now I see that if I want to achieve perfection, I must work, work very hard, and I also see that even though I entered the convent, I brought my 'ego' and my defects with me."

And indeed, she would still explode with impatience sometimes. "I remember," said one of her co-sisters, "how she once stood knocking at the door of Mother Superior. As she received no reply she went on knocking six more times, after which she banged her fist at the door and left angrily." Another one recalls how annoyed she had been while working with the other nuns and novices; she had been given a paring knife that was too small for the job she had to do. She became red in the face, trembling all over. On another occasion she answered back when one of her superiors reprimanded her for not eating the bread. "It is not your business to tell me what to do. I eat what I want." Many recall that her critical spirit was even stronger, but that with the passing of time, she managed to control herself. Even though purplish red in the face, she would say nothing and run away, or fall on her knees and apologize. She was no softy. She had a strong personality; she struggled hard and won. She was loved by all, also because she was always available for the heaviest and most tiring jobs.

And that was no small thing in that tiny, obscure Trappist Abbey of Grottaferrara. There, in observance of a rigid rule painstakingly codified in its most minute details, the strictest vow of seclusion, the most rigorous silence, and the most austere discipline of life were marked by a deep spirit of penance, by the enduring of sometimes heroic sacrifices, and by concrete faith in divine Providence in a situation of authentic poverty.

Whenever she had permission, Sister Gabriella wrote a great deal to her family in Dorgali about her life in the Trappist abbey, and thus involuntarily left a sizeable autobiography. Yet, paradoxically, she left a total void in it, a gap which, according to Father Paolino Beltrame Quattrocchi, her biographer, leaves out the very element that made her "famous": the one on which the Lord wanted to focus the attention of the entire ecclesial world — the offering of her life for Unity.

*A harsh, abrasive temperament... Sister Gabriella managed in a few years to control herself. "Now I see that if I want to achieve perfection I must work; work very hard." She struggled hard and won.*

It is important to know that the Abbess of Grottaferrata, Mother Pia Gullini, Italian by birth but brought up and educated at the Abbey of Laval in France, was strongly attracted to the French Trappist mentality of the time. She "had received the gift of an early intuition of ecumenism and the desire to establish, before its time, a direct relationship of true and deep spiritual brotherhood between her community and that of the Anglican Benedictine community of Nashdom."

In fact, it was by turning to the memoirs left by the Abbess and by keeping in mind the ecumenical spirit that pervaded the Trappist Abbey of Grottaferrata that it was possible to fill the gap in Sister Gabriella's autobiography, and reconstruct the historical moment of her sanctification.

It was in January 1938, on the occasion of the Christian Unity Octave, that a letter from Father Couturier reached Grottaferrata with the news that an Italian trappist nun, a Japanese trappist monk and a French Protestant pastor had offered their lives for Christian Unity, and that God had accepted them.

Sister Gabriella, who some time before had already written in her notes "I could never see someone make a sacrifice without my wanting to make one, too," went to the Abbess, knelt at her feet, and begged her for permission to offer her own life for the unity of the Church. "My life isn't worth anything, anyway," she said, "after all, I can't do a thing." Mother Pia, saying neither yes nor no, advised, "Go and talk to the chaplain and then the Lord will do what he wants." The chaplain gave his consent; the Abbess accepted.

"I'm ready for everything, even for tuberculosis," said Sister Gabriella, talking about the disease she dreaded most. A few days after her offer, the first symptoms of illness began to appear; they were the unmistakeable symptoms of tuberculosis.

She coughed, she lost color, she lost weight; she could hardly keep up with her work, and yet she continued to get up at 2 a.m. according to the rule, and take care of all the other duties as prescribed. Her co-sisters informed the Mother Superior: "She has a nasty cough." The Mother Superior called the doctor, but he understood nothing. "Don't you see how strong, how robust this girl is? Look at her shoulders! It's

*Dorgali, surrounded by fields and meadows, is the little Sardinian town where, from 1914 to 1935, Mau' Segheddu lived the years of her rebellious childhood and restless youth.*

only a cold." He didn't even bother to take x-rays. By the time he realized his enormous mistake, it was too late. He rushed her to a Rome hospital where the x-rays revealed the death sentence. "She might as well go back to die in her convent."

She did return with a high fever, but continued to take her daily walks as required. Everytime they would see her stagger, the sisters would carry her back to bed. Keenly conscious of the infectiousness of her disease, Sister Gabriella asked to wear her working veil and scapular so that the better clothing might be saved for the community. She even asked to be buried in her old clothing. She shared a room with another nun, also ill with tuberculosis; she couldn't tolerate the smallest breath of air, while Sister Gabriella would have taken off the roof in order to get more. The Abbess tried to solve the problem by having the only window in the room "half shut and half open, so that both might have a chance of making a sacrifice of mortification." The winter was bitter cold for both patients, as gusts of biting icy air came in through the cracks in the ceiling, with precious little relief from the tiny container of burning charcoal which was their only source of heat. At one point, it was decided that the room needed to be disinfected. The two patients remained inside with all the doors and windows shut and "there was not a sound of complaint from those two girls," a witness will say later.

Sister Gabriella's greatest worry was that her companions might contract her disease. "This illness is my wealth," she used to say, "but I don't want to share it with anybody." She wouldn't let them near her bed. Everything she touched had to be disinfected with alcohol. She wouldn't even touch a book that belonged to the community. She continued, however, to read her own books, even while burning with a high fever. Her "abrasive" temperament raised its head one more time, but only to show that it had been tamed. It happened one evening when, in the state she was in, with her extreme aversion for food, she was brought a plate of potatoes and salad for dinner. Laughing, she said to the nurse, "Were it not for the will of God, I would throw this in your face!"

To receive the Sacrament of the Sick she was taken downstairs to the Choir. As she sat in front of the grating, she was seen to be smiling and radiant. On April 30, 1939, on Good Shepherd Sunday, the sacrifice of Sister Gabriella of Unity was accomplished. In those eleven months — of which she wrote nothing — the little Trappist nun with the iron will had run full speed ahead on the road of perfection for the ideal of love — the ideal of one Church in which there would be no more separations.

# It is love that counts

by CHIARA LUBICH

Speaking of love, of charity, Pope Paul VI in an address to the Australian bishops gathered together in Sydney, said: "This is — it seems to us — the principle virtue required of the Catholic Church at this hour in the world."

If this is so, as indeed it is, the twentieth century Christian has to be 'living charity' moment by moment, to answer the needs of the Church and the questions of the world.

This is what the Christian should aim at: true love, knowing well how everything counts if it is inspired and carried out with love, and nothing counts without it, at least in the final account of one's life.

This then is what Christians should commit themselves to, so that they can say, after finishing every task: *this is something which will remain.*

It should be like this in their everyday work, in their reading, in attending to their affairs, in the education of their children, in their conversation, their travels, the way they dress, their manner of eating, even their sleep. In their smallest action . . . with all the unexpected things God will ask of them day by day.

So it should be, and this is extremely consoling in the case of the person who is sick and confined to bed or incapacitated by an endless convalescence and can do practically nothing.

Like this, just like this — how often have we said it, how often forgotten it — because it is not the job, the writing, the activity, even if it is apostolic, that counts, but love that should be the soul of our life.

And everyone can do this.

For God it is not the action in itself which matters but the love that counts. It is love that keeps the world going, since even if a person has a mission to carry out, this is all the more fruitful the more it is an expression of love.

But we should remember that there is love and love. And the love distilled from a shred of life that is wearing itself out like Christ on the cross, is surely more powerful than the love of one who offers — and everything is to be offered — the joyful and serene things life gives.

Then, so that we Christians be not behind the times, we must try to put love into everything we do, especially making sure we do not lack love when life proves most difficult and painful.

## CARDINAL BENELLI

Giovanni Cardinal Benelli, the Archbishop of Florence, who died on October 26, 1982, was a close friend of the Focolare Movement from 1944 onwards, when he first met Chiara Lubich. He was born at Poggiole di Vernio near Pistoia, Italy in 1921 and was ordained in 1943. In 1946 he graduated from the Pontifical Academy and, as a trained diplomat, became private secretary to Monsignor Montini, future Pope Paul VI. His diplomatic career took him to Dublin, Paris, Rio de Janeiro, Madrid and Senegal. In 1957 he was recalled by Pope Paul VI and appointed Under-Secretary at the Secretariat of State In 1966 he was consecrated bishop and in 1977, shortly after his appointment as Archbishop of Florence, he was made a Cardinal.

In February 1982 he attended a meeting of bishops who are friends of the Focolare Movement and he spoke about his close contact with Pope Paul VI. "For ten years I was close to Paul VI. Clearly my love for the Vicar of Christ and the human affection I had for him meant that all Pope Paul VI thought and did had a great effect on me. He had a very deep esteem, I would say almost more than esteem, he had deep feelings of gratitude towards the Movement, and feelings of admiration and expectation, and his expectations were satisfied. These were the feelings of Paul VI; I think I inherited them a little in myself, in my inmost self."

In 1977 Cardinal Benelli visited the Focolare International town at Loppiano near Florence. In thanking Chiara Lubich who had welcomed him he said: "I truly feel myself under the action of grace. As the hierarchical Church I feel I am your debtor, you who are such a limpid and living expression of the Mystical Body. I feel indebted to you and all this lymph which flows through this Body... I now see more clearly I can count fully on all of you. And this gives me great inner strength. Let us remain always united."

The Focolare Movement collaborated with Cardinal Benelli in pastoral work in his diocese, including setting up a center for international students in Florence; caring for Vietnamese refugees; developing ecumenical work and also wider projects for the lay apostolate on a national level.

Cardinal Benelli also visited England with a party of young people in order to promote ecumenical understanding, and he welcomed parties of Anglicans and Lutherans to his diocese who were attending Focolare ecumenical conferences. Cardinal Benelli was present in Canterbury at the enthronement of Dr. Runcie and he was also admired and loved by the Orthodox Church, particularly the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul.

During the Mariapolis at Assisi last July, he spoke of his love for the Focolare Movement and for the "newness" which he saw as being its characteristic. "We keep hearing that we should come together in unity, in peace, in a spirit of brotherhood," he said among other things. "Yet unity is not a reality. At this very moment there are fifteen wars going on — human beings alone are not able to build unity. Christ said: 'Love one another as I have loved you.' This 'as' is what the Movement has rediscovered and helped very many to discover all over the world." This is the secret of the "newness" he had seen in the Movement and which he envisioned as coming about through the collaboration of all.

## BISHOPS FOR UNITY

Thirteen bishops from various Christian Churches gathered in response to a personal invitation at the Mariapolis Center of Rocca di Papa, in Italy. Bishop Klaus Hemmerle, Bishop of Aquisgrana in Germany, dealt with the topic of unity in the bishop's ministry and among bishops. Chiara Lubich was invited to speak about the spirituality of unity of the Focolare Movement and its effects on the relationship with the faithful of the great religions.

On October 13, 1982 the thirteen bishops participated in a general audience with the Pope who greeted them as follows: "With special joy I greet a group of friends of the Focolare Movement — the Anglican, Evangelical, Orthodox and Catholic bishops meeting at Rocca di Papa. Through your presence and your pursuit of truth in love, may our Lord Jesus Christ reveal himself ever more fully to each of you, and may the word of Christ abide always in your hearts."

Bishop Ramon Torella, Vicepresident for the Secretariat for Christian Unity and Archbishop Agostino Mayer, Secretary of the Congregation for the Religious, both visited the meeting.

This kind of dialogue based on personal experiences of life as well as theological studies, encourages the growth in communion. The bishops wished to close the meeting with a "pact of mutual love." They expressed their desire to make this meeting an annual event with more bishops participating in it.

## NEW HUMANITY DAY IN ROME

Close to two hundred people from all over North America will soon be on their way to Rome. They will be among the thousands of participants from all over the world expected at the International New Humanity Day taking place on March 20th in the Sports Arena in Rome.

Living City will present full coverage of this event in an upcoming issue.

# WORD OF LIFE

"If there is one of you
who has not sinned,
let him be the first
to throw a stone"
(Jn. 8:7)

**"If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone."**

While Jesus was teaching in the temple, the Scribes and Pharisees brought in a woman who had been caught committing adultery. They said to Jesus, "Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?"

They wanted to set a trap for him with this question. In fact, if Jesus had shown himself to be against the stoning, they could have accused him of going against the law. For according to the law, actual witnesses were to begin throwing stones at the one who had sinned, and then the people were to follow in turn. If, instead, Jesus had confirmed the sentence of death, they would have succeeded in making him contradict his own teaching about God's mercy towards sinners.

But Jesus, who unperturbed, was bent down writing on the ground with his finger, finally straightened up and said,

**"If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone."**

When they heard this, one by one the accusers went away, beginning with the eldest. Jesus then turned to the woman and asked, "Where are they? Has no one condemned you?" "No one, sir," she replied. "Neither do I condemn you," said Jesus. "Go away and do not sin any more."

**"If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone."**

With these words, Jesus certainly does not wish to appear permissive with regard to wrongdoing, such as adultery. His words, "Go away and do not sin any more," clearly express God's commandment.

Rather Jesus wishes to unmask the hypocrisy of those who set themselves up as judges of their fellow human beings who have sinned, without recognizing that they themselves are sinners. His words here underline the well-known command: "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; because the judgments you give are the judgments you will get" (Mt. 7:1-2).

Speaking in this way, Jesus also addresses himself to those who, in the name of the law, ignore the person involved and do not take into account the repentance which sinners may feel in their hearts. This clearly shows what Jesus' attitude is towards one who has done wrong: he is merciful. As St. Augustine put it, when the accusers of the adulteress had gone away, "two persons remained: one in need of mercy and the other Mercy itself."

**"If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone."**

How can we put this word of life into practice?

In all our dealings with others, let us remember that we too are sinners. All of us have sinned; and even if we think that we ourselves have not fallen into serious sin, we must bear in mind that we may not know just how strongly circumstances have influenced others, causing them to fall and to stray far from God. We do not know how we would have acted had we been in their place.

In any case, we too have broken the bond of love which was meant to unite us to God. We have been unfaithful to him. Therefore it could be said that we too, somehow, have fallen into adultery in his regard.

If Jesus, who was certainly without sin, did not throw the first stone at the adulteress, neither can we condemn others. We should have compassion toward everyone, resisting those impulses that drive us to condemn others without mercy. We must learn how to forgive and forget. We should not harbor traces of judgment or resentment in our hearts since these can easily give rise to anger and hatred which alienate us from others. We should see every person as "new" in every moment.

If our hearts are filled with love and compassion towards all, rather than judgment and condemnation, we will help others to begin a new life, to find the courage to start anew.

CHIARA LUBICH

# EXPERIENCES

**The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers have shared with us.**

## THE SOLUTION

In the summer of 1981, my father had asked me if I would be able to come home for a longer time the next summer to help take care of my sister-in-law who had been getting progressively worse with multiple sclerosis which she had had for twenty seven years. This was a great emotional strain on my brother and he needed some relief. Although I was not inclined to spend too much time at home, for the sake of my brother and because my father had asked me, I in turn asked permission from my religious superior to do so. The permission was given generously, and so I spent most of the summer months of 1982 living at my brother's house and helping in whichever ways I could.

The word of life for June was "And know that I am with you always until the end of the world" (Mt.28:20). I knew he would be with me and I had made up my mind to give all I could for my family. That meant getting up very early every morning so that I could assist at Mass and pray a little afterwards because the remainder of the day would not be mine. It also meant being house-bound for most of the summer.

The words in the commentary for that month kept coming back: "He is right here, next to me, next to you. We can find him in the poor, in the despised, in the sick, . . . in the little children, in the doubtful, in whomever is deprived of freedom, in the outcast . . ." My sister-in-law was all of these and so every time she needed help to move from one place to another I would say, "Jesus, this is you."

As the summer progressed, I began to wonder what was going to happen when it was time for me to leave. I realized more than ever before, that my brother needed both physical and moral support. What role was I to play in all this? My life is already committed in a religious community to which I really wanted to participate fully, not just as a "fringe member." During July, I made a retreat at the motherhouse and that only increased my desire to live in and not out of community. I prayed to Our Lady and told her my need and my brother's need. Then I began to ask everyone I knew if there was some person who would be interested in living in at my brother's house and would be willing enough and strong enough to take care of a multiple sclerosis patient. Before the month was up I had contacted a sister of a member of our community who was willing enough and strong enough to take the job. She herself was struggling to make ends meet and trying to support herself and her two-year-old girl. She offered to begin living and working at my brother's house on August 1. After three months, she and her little girl have become members of the family. Many of her financial worries have been alleviated and my brother and the whole family are more than pleased with her. I am now living in community once again close enough to my family so that I can still help when I'm needed. Now that is a hundredfold!

Sr. L. D.

## THE EXTRA STEP

A friend of mine called me early one morning with quite a serious problem. She is self-employed, and her problem involved her business. I tried to make myself "one" with her so that she would know that her suffering was mine. This really didn't seem like enough, but I couldn't think of anything else to do for her.

After I hung up I thought about the word of life which I had been trying to live during that time; "Anyone who wants to become great among you must be your servant" (Mk. 10:43), and I realized that perhaps there might be more I could do to help my friend. So I called her to see if she would like to get together so that we could discuss her situation a little further. She liked the idea, and we arranged a time and place.

When finally we met I learned that my friend had already worked out several solutions to her problem. She seemed relaxed, so I mainly listened with love while she spoke about her business situation. Little by little she began to discuss other problems and events in her life. Our meeting was becoming quite lengthy, but I realized that this was another opportunity for me to live the word of life. So, with a newfound joy, I continued to love her and to listen.

S.H.

Paolo Scirpa

# A CYCLE WHICH STARTS FROM GOD

Men are holy when they have risen from the death of their own ego, by becoming sons of God. Through Christ we have access to God, through him we become sons of God. And how? By the sacraments, by faith in Christ, and therefore by the carrying out of his will. "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you and calumniate you, in order that you may be sons of the Father. . ." (Mt. 5:44-45). "He who loves is born of God" (1 Jn. 47). It is easy therefore: you love and you become a son of God; that is, you participate in his nature, which is love. In this way men become "fellow citizens of the saints and members of the family of God," (Eph. 2:19).

As the miracle of the reunion of the sons with their Father was the outcome of the killing of hostility in the body of Christ, so it is prolonged as the outcome of the killing of the old man in each one of us to make us Christ's Body.

To unite ourselves to God and with our brothers we must make room for his grace, by ridding the soul of that mountain which is love of self. It is a mountain on which an idolatry is celebrated with the ego set up as the idol. Now idolatry excludes religion. The main who loves himself, contemplates himself and lives himself; the man who loves God contemplates God and lives him. To love self is to live hell on earth; to love God is to live paradise already here below.

To empty ourselves in this way is to throw away the carnal encumbrance of jealousies and envies, pride and vanity, with the very pains and torments to which the limitations of egoism give rise. Certainly it is a risky moment when the creature "is born anew," is born to a second life, which is the true one. A rending is effected then which recalls that of physical birth, when a being detaches itself, with blood, from the maternal womb.

In fact the second birth implies a detaching of self from the womb of habits which may be very fine, of affections that are often very dear, even from practices of piety, as well as from persons in whose company the soul took pleasure. The cutting away of that connection, connatural to our flesh, hurts and draws blood; we are tempted to avoid it, by pushing forward, like a mole into the sub-soil of compromise.

Instead, those who, like Christ on the Cross, accept that phase of transition, which consists in a sort of crucifixion — "They who follow Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and its appetites" (Gal. 5:24). in which when in a moment of abandonment the world around seems to break up and the soul in agony is torn from men and from God, and almost as if hurled into the void, enters through hell, into glory, where persons and things present themselves from a new standpoint and affections take on a divine substance, those truly love. They love with a love where human sympathies and personal calculations, fleeting matters, do not enter. They love as God does, as the Father loves the Son, as Jesus loves us. Since they are at home in Paradise, the love of the Trinity becomes their love, a cycle which starts from God and, having embraced man, returns to God. Man then is a creature through whom the Creator loves.

Accepting, in fidelity to him, the sacrifice which was formerly his, we (in fact) love all people as the Father loves them, and we love the Father as Jesus loves him. We are Christ who loves by shedding his blood.

*From The Divine Adventure*
by Igino Giordani

# FAMILY LIFE

## A FAMILY OF NEW FAMILIES

A small swing dangling in the middle of a long corridor of a country house, is one of the few memories of Clara's childhood. "Daddy had put that up for us children," Clara says. But who is this Clara in this family of families? In fact the story could start at any point because it's a continuous chain with many links: twenty-three to be exact. An interlacing of relationships: husband and wife; mother, father and children; grandparents, uncles, aunts and nephews; brothers, brothers-in-law, cousins, mothers and fathers-in-law, daughters and sons-in-law. This is the story of several couples, very different one from the other but composing together a single mosaic.

To follow in the traditional logic, let's start with Paola and Gigi Rocco, the parents of Clara and her brother and sisters Laura, Anna and Aldo. Gigi, the father, was an artist: very sensitive and a little timid. He was a professor of art and had painted since he was a little child. Some of the children inherited his artistic vein. Paola, the mother was cheerful, easy to get along with, a "realist" as she calls herself. They spent the first years of their marriage in Chiari, a town near Brescia, Italy

"Serenity" could be the label for this first period punctuated by the birth of their four children. As the children grew, it became clear that especially for their education they would have to move to a larger city. They decided after much thought and uncertainty to move to Milan. The very Sunday after they moved they were invited to attend a meeting of the Milanese community of the Focolare Movement. They experienced a feeling of acceptance and belonging. "For us," Paola says, "it was a meeting with the love of God. The trauma of the adjustment to the big city was easily overcome." "We all grew together in the life of the Gospel and the strong bond that had always tied the six of us together was transformed and became more mature," Paola concludes.

The year that followed though, brought major difficulties: Gigi's protracted absence from home due to his annual assignment at the University of Lecce, at the other tip of Italy; the growing economic needs of the family; a long and serious illness of Paola. But all this seemed to bind them together even more, in a stronger unity. All the people that came in contact with them received light, strength, encouragement and understanding.

But suddenly a crisis broke out and this equilibrium was broken. Gigi explains, "The progress to the secondary school and later on to the University brought our children in contact with new persons and environments. They were almost forced to make choices that were not in harmony with the reality they used to live in the family. We had many sleepless nights. When the dialogue with one or the other of our children became impossible, the only way to communicate with them was a little note left at the foot of the bed. We went through moments of intense suffering: everything seemed to crumble and all around us was darkness."

"But Gigi and I," Paola continues, "just would not give up. We struggled to reach a unity even more profound, a unity involving our thoughts, prayers and everything that we did. Even when one of the children, in his own peculiar way, started in a passionate but also dangerous search for himself, we tried, with all our hearts, to participate in this search, that at times seemed so painful, almost at the point of crushing him.

"Many times we were tempted to turn our back, but our children, our in-laws, all our friends were there to share with us our suffering, and their presence gave us the courage to go ahead.

"Many years have passed now, and our children have their own families. We can say that in spite of the fact that many times one or the other seemed to deviate from the right way, at the end each one of them has come to a personal encounter with God who is love. We were brought back together to compose a new har-

*ABOVE: A photo of almost the entire Rocco family gathered together last Christmas.*

mony which, as we discovered, only God could devise."

## NOW WE ARE A FAMILY

Anna and her husband Sergio were helped through the crisis in their marriage by the Rocco family. They had no children and after years of marriage their relationship had deteriorated to such a point that they were ready for a separation. As a last resort, Anna advanced a timid proposal: "Why don't we try to adopt a baby?" But her effort was met with a curt answer from Sergio: "What kind of a family do we have to offer him?"

Gigi and Paola were close to them and tried everything to support them. They offered them a trip to Rome where there was an international meeting of the Focolare especially for families.

"Even today I'm unable to explain why we accepted their invitation" recalls Sergio. "The fact remained though that for us it was an event that changed our lives. I had always said to Anna: "Yes, I like your family, but they belong to the 'good people' category, and I do not. And that would close the discussion. This time though I heard many different people talking about love among husband and wife, and their stories were full of pain and difficulties even worse than our own. Suddenly I discovered that God loves us all, good and bad, with the same love. Unexpectedly our situation was reversed. At the last day of the meeting, during Mass, Anna and I were able to ask forgiveness of each other, realizing that up until then we had always been very selfish, expecting everything from the other.

"Back home it wasn't easy to start anew because we had acquired the habit to treat each other with hostility. But we had met many families like Paola and Gigi and they would not let us go. Sometimes it was a visit or a discrete call on the phone. Some other time it was an S.O.S. on our part. The dialogue among the two of us slowly re-opened. We started to put down the basis of our new life, a life now really deserving this name.

"So one day I said to Anna: 'Now we are a family. Why don't we offer it to someone who does not have one?' Three months later Lalla, our daughter who is now ten years old, entered our life and our home, a tangible sign of the love of God for us. Some years later, at the end of our summer vacation, a couple that had a place on the beach next to ours, said to us: 'Next year we would like to invite you to spend the vacation at our home, to be closer to you. There is such a unity among you, and we would love to know its secret. We do nothing but fight!'."

## BETWEEN MOTHER AND DAUGHTER-IN-LAW

Laura is the oldest daughter of Gigi and Paola. She is married to a cardiologist, Dario, who first entered the house because of his profession. His love for Laura started almost unnoticed on the

background of his relationship with the whole family, a relationship that slowly helped him overcome a long period of crisis and confusion.

"My Christian ideas," Dario says, "no longer had any bearing on my everyday life. For me God had become an abstract entity. The current mentality and my professional environment had convinced me that, although the Christian message was a fascinating one, it was impossible to live it concretely. I was filled with aprehension, dissatisfaction and an undefined nostalgia. But once I rediscovered the meaning of life, through the contact with the Rocco family, little by little all my relationships, personal and professional, started to change: with my colleagues at the hospital, with my patients, with the head nurse of my division, with my own parents. My mother already knew the Movement but was never able to talk to me about it.

*BELOW: Laura and Dario Granata with their three children: Elena, Chiara and Anna.*

In the course of this interview I asked Laura: "How are things going between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, when they both share the same ideal of life?" She smiled: "Naturally there are difficulties! We belong to different generations, and our personalities, tastes and outlooks are also different. Even our ways of cooking, keeping house or raising children are not the same. There would be plenty of reasons to quarrel. But both of us do our best not to allow this to happen. Of course, the fact that both of us are going toward the same goal is of great help. Sometimes when my mother-in-law leaves our home, or I leave her house, knowing that we have failed to love one another, we try to re-establish unity before the day is over. We have made a pact never to let the sun go down on anything unsettled, to prevent building up resentments toward each other. So we try to clarify immediately what went wrong and why it happened, and readily we ask each other forgiveness for any misunderstanding. I can see that this pact of unity that we strive to keep each day has a very positive effect also on the children."

Anna Granata, the mother-in-law, lost her husband a few years ago. Though with different words and expressions, she repeated the very same experience that Laura shared.

## A REDISCOVERED ENCHANTEMENT

Barbara and Aldo are the daughter-in-law and son of the Rocco's.

"The youth protests of 1968 and all the social and political problems in which the youth unrest had its roots," Aldo tells us, "slowly took me away from the life of the Gospel which had nourished me in my family and which I had tried to live deeply up to that point. This created a split in the family. I questioned and rejected everything and tried to engage everyone in heated discussions. Never, though, did I feel misjudged by my parents, or treated any differently by my sisters.

"It was at this time that I met Barbara. Her experience was totally different from mine. She never had any religious conviction. Though we loved each other, we started our relationship without making any long-range plan or any serious choice of respecting purity. At a certain point we found ourselves in a state of great confusion: neither of us any longer knew what we wanted or what we expected from each other. Everything that I tried, even positive experiences, would leave me dissatisfied: something was lacking inside of me, something I could not define.

"One day, while Barbara and I were on a trip, almost by chance we stopped at a small town called Loppiano.[1] We stayed there until the next day. Barbara wanted to see everything: this was her first encounter with God. For her it was like coming to life. For me it was like a rebirth and it made me think back to the time when, as a little boy, I had made a pact with God, asking him that he should lead me back to him, even by force, if I ever strayed away from his path.

"We left Loppiano with a completely new outlook on life. It was hard, though, to get back on to the right track. We found many obstacles in our way that tempted us to turn back to the old kind of life. But little by little we discovered a new joy, enjoying each other with a rediscovered enchantment. Finally we got married."

*ABOVE: Barbara and Aldo Rocco shortly after their wedding.*

## THERE IS MUCH MORE

Clara, the third daughter of Gigi and Paola, and her husband Dario Fortis, are now telling us their story.

"I got to know Clara's family," begins Dario, "during a period of my life in which I felt very unsettled. All my ideals, political and social, were crumbling. Even though I was young I was already a widower.

"When I met the Rocco family I felt immediately accepted and understood. I entered a world where harmonious relationships between parents and children were possible, and where a vital sharing with many other families was a reality. The closer I got to them, the more curious I became to discover the secret and the roots of their lifestyle. Living in contact with all these families, I realized that God was the center and driving force in their lives: that was their secret! I wanted to get closer to this God of whom I knew nothing. The means for reaching this goal became clearer to me later on, when I discovered that I had to look at all my neighbors without prejudice, paying special attention to each one of them, just as all of these families had done with me. My love for Clara flourished in this context in a very simple and natural way."

"Ever since I was a little child," intervenes Clara, "I had always lived in this way in my family. During my teenage years, however, I felt strongly the need to make my own choices and to reach my own decisions. I threw myself into a series of activities that made me feel useful and alive. I was hoping in this way to develop all my po-

*Clara Fortis with Paolo and Nada.*

tential as a human being. During this time, though, the thought of God started to fade away. It was only later on, after many disillusionments and the encounter with Dario and our participation as an engaged couple in meetings of the New Families, that I found myself once more totally involved in my former life. Now, as an adult, I was able to 'recognize' the ideal of my youth.

"We got married and Paolo was born. Now he is already five years old. In April 1980, Dario and I, in a moment of particular unity, communicated to each other a desire that we had kept only in our hearts until then: the desire to adopt a baby.

"In sharing the same desire we felt a great joy as if our unity were giving in some way life to the baby in that particular moment. Immediately we started the proceedings for an adoption. We did not know when and who would arrive. But we knew that we could trust the love of the Father of us all. In the Fall, I received an urgent call concerning a baby girl, Nada, ten months old, who had been abandoned at the hospital. Because of a serious cerebral illness she was blind and deaf. I was asked to share this baby's needs with all the other people in our New Family group. Our group had already been asked to help in many cases like this before, but this time it was different. I felt like this appeal was addressed to me, to us. Dario felt the same. So we decided to go ahead and accept the responsibility for this baby girl ourselves. After the decision, though, we felt really scared. What would this imply, especially for our little Paolo? We felt that we had to make him a part of our project. We talked to him about this little sister and explained to him her situation. Immediately he asked, 'But why did they abandon her?' 'Maybe,' we tried to explain, 'because of her particular sickness.' And he immediately replied: 'I want her'."

"On our way to the hospital," continues Dario, "a lot of doubts and fears started to surface again. But as soon as we saw her, we felt that she would be a gift for us. As we took her in our arms, she smiled. The pediatrician who was also present was surprised and found this quite unusual for her. So, from the first moment, Nada has been a gift for us, a very big gift.

"Her arrival in our home was a feast. Her presence among us changed the quality of our relationship: There was a new awareness, a delicate new feeling among the three of us, as though Nada, with her presence, was making sacred our everyday actions, even the simplest ones. We were touching with our hands the reality of what the priest had told us the day of her Baptism: 'You may hope to have the presence of the Father among you, since in Nada you accepted the presence of his Son.'

"We were much surprised at Paolo's behavior. He is a very active young boy, so his tenderness toward his little sister was very striking. On many occasions we found him preparing with much care his sister's crib. When he was playing he always wanted Nada to be close to him. We also found that Nada was attracting a variety of people, friends and neighbors. She generated around herself a spontaneous love and generosity. At the same time, though, some people found it difficult to accept her and understand our choice."

"It was the first day of May," concludes Clara, "when Nada left us. For all of us this was a great

suffering, but I realized that this suffering was our offering on God's altar, and that Nada, with her death, had opened a new door and completed a bridge going to God. As someone noticed, even the funeral was a joyous occasion, just like the Baptism. All our family, relatives and friends gathered around Nada. How many children could claim to belong to a family so large and loving?"

Dario remarks: "After giving it some thought, I came to the conclusion that all our relationships, even the ones that seem so natural, actually are kind of special." Referring to his brother-in-law, he exclaims in a sort of amusement, "It's funny, because Dario is not a common name, but here we are, the two of us, sharing the same name, in the same family, and yet coming from very different backgrounds. We are both doctors, and we help each other, not only professionally, but also in our private lives. For me, he is even more than a brother, we trust each other completely, and our friendship is without comparison.

"Our wives share the same feelings. Looking at them one realizes that there is much more than just a sister-to-sister relationship, a bond much stronger than just a family tie."

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*1)A small city built by the Focolare Movement near Florence, Italy. It embodies a concrete expression of a society founded on the Gospel. Its inhabitants live according to the spirituality of the Focolare Movement.*

# The (5) Mariapolises of next summer will be the following:

SOUTHWEST:
New Mexico Highlands University
Las Vegas, New Mexico
**June 26, after supper – July 2, after breakfast**

MIDWEST:
University of Wisconsin
Plattville, Wisconsin
**July 3, after supper – July 9, after breakfast**

NORTHWEST:
Western Washington University
Bellingham, Washington
**July 10, after supper – July 16, after breakfast**

CARIBBEAN:
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic
**Dates to be announced.**

EAST COAST:
Alfred University
Alfred, New York
**August 7, after supper – August 13, after breakfast**

A new Women's Center of the Focolare Movement recently opened in Washington, D.C.

The address is the following:

Focolare Movement
P.O. Box 4958
Washington, D.C. 20008

# The STOWAWAY

When I asked the captain about his ship he described it as you would the house where you were born — with great pride and nostalgic love. His description made me want to go and see it but there was not time and we had a long journey ahead of us. He seemed to want to go on talking and so I asked him to tell me about some of his adventures at sea. He was flattered by my interest and began this fascinating story...

We had just set sail and I was in my cabin when the engineer came in and told me in great agitation that we had a stowaway on board. It was the first time in all my years at sea that this had happened and I asked the second officer to go and have a look. "Yes," he reported, "it was true." There was a man, badly dressed and no longer very young, in the hold. He was unarmed and was crouching in a corner refusing to speak. As I went down below to see for myself I was thinking of how we would have to return to port and hand him over to the police, losing several hours in the process.

As soon as he saw me, he stood up. I was the captain! I sat down opposite him while he remained standing and asked him his name and why he had boarded my ship. He was embarrassed at first and kept his head down but eventually he began to tell his story.

He was an engineer, married with three children, and had managed his own factory but when he did not make a success of it, he had become discouraged and got into debt, whereupon his wife and children had left him. Nobody believed in him and he wanted to run away to a place where nobody would know him and he could live in peace. So, he had gone down to the harbor and climbed up the gangway of the first unlit ship he came across.

He spoke haltingly and then began to cry. For me, a sailor, a man who cries is a coward. In everything he said he showed how weak he was, one of so many who are incapable of facing up to life. I was sorry for him but he was not the kind you can help along by offering a few dollars.

I got up to go to the ship's radio officer and he stood there crying. Just at that moment, like a fleeting beam from a lighthouse, a phrase flashed through my mind, "Blessed are those who weep . . ." I had read a commentary on it recently. It said whoever weeps, and for whatever reason, is blessed. I was the captain and on the side of right and justice but he was "blessed." I had never understood that word in such a way. I was stunned.

Slowly, I went back up on deck. The sea was calm and as black as the moonless sky. I made my decision. I gathered the crew in the dining-room and explained the man's situation, our duty was to hand him over to the police. Yet, in spite of this I proposed, provided they all agreed, to continue our voyage and bring him back with us on our return. If even one did not like the idea, though, we would turn back immediately. It did not take them long to decide; they all agreed with me.

I had the man brought to my cabin and proposed that he remain on board, free to move around while we were at sea, provided he stayed in the hold while we were in port. Then, we would take him back to where he joined us. He accepted and remained faithful to the conditions.

I telephoned my wife and told her I would be bringing a guest home. On the return journey I wondered what to do about the man. That "blessedness" of his in front of God obliged me to do

something for him. It seemed to me that the situation held a particular significance for me personally, as though it were of the most intimate concern to me.

I had been observing him during the long hours at sea. He was silent and resigned, with no apparent aim. He let himself be carried along by events, like a boat adrift. Gradually, I evolved a plan for him. When we disembarked, I gave him some sailor's clothing and he left the ship without being questioned.

I took him home with me and my wife and children welcomed him as a colleague. They had prepared a room for him and he retreated to it rather tired and frightened. I told my family the whole story and they agreed to my proposal. We decided to welcome him as he was, to love him and help him without offending him or expecting anything, and then we would see.

He was an unexpected guest who had entered our life quite by chance. For us, though, there is no such thing as chance. There is a reason for everything, even when we cannot see what it is. We call it Providence, God, and we find peace by falling in with his unexpected plans.

Two days later, I set off again with a new cargo for new ports of call. After a little while, he asked my wife if he could go out when she did and so he followed her to Church and to the market, helping her to carry the shopping bag, and as the days passed he started to help her with other jobs too.

Meanwhile, I had managed to find his family's address and had written to them. When I got back there was a letter from his children who were anxious to see their father, as they had not heard from him for a long time. His wife, however, replied boldly that she had suffered too much and did not want to see him again. So his children came and were welcomed by mine. He even got to know my friends and little by little the frown disappeared from his face.

Some neighbors and acquaintances criticized me for having left another man in my house while I went to sea but we took no notice of them. My relationship with my wife has always been very special, characterized by constant separation and reunion, with the result that our love for each other is always alive and strong. The man noticed our relationship as well as the happy exchanges between us and our children.

With the help of a friend I managed to rent a room and kitchen for him. I took him there one day when I was ashore. It was really quite a miserable lodging but I had brought some tins of paint and brushes and a ladder and we put on some old clothes and started to paint it together.

My wife had mentioned to someone in the parish that there was somebody in need of furniture and so in no time at all the room was furnished. I heard that some of the Sisters of Mother Teresa had just moved into an old house in the neighborhood, so I took my man to them and offered his services as a painter, in return for which they gave him his meals.

He lived like this for a while and whenever I came home my family brought me up to date about his progress. He was finding work by himself and was happy.

Then, one afternoon, he telephoned me. "Captain, I've found somebody who is worse than I was. He is sleeping here and does a bit of work but needs somebody to talk to him in the way you know how."

"But where did you pick him up? What does he do?" Rather hesitantly, but laughing a little at the same time, he answered, "I don't know yet . . . he was crying . . . I did for him what you did for me."

**compiled by Dori Zamboni**

# The young and the Gospel

A little while ago I was sick, and I stayed home. I rested in the morning and in the afternoon I felt better. My little brother and sister were awake and my mother asked me to help her with them. I wanted to love her, so I said that I would. I tried to love my little brother and sister and I played what they wanted to play.

**Christine**
**13 years old**

One day I got up and I made my bed. Then my mom asked me to make my sister's bed too and I didn't want to because she always leaves her room in a mess. So I got mad. But I wanted to do an act of love so I made it.

**Brienna**
**8 years old**

Yesterday I wasn't feeling well but someone had asked me to go to a pot-luck dinner with her, and so I went with her because I wanted to love Jesus in her. The hundredfold was that I had a good time even though I didn't feel good.

**Malena**
**13 years old**

There is an old lady who lives next door to us. She calls me a lot to go to the store for her but then sometimes I am busy and I don't want to go. But then I saw Jesus in her and I went to the store.

**Susan**
**8 years old**

I was playing four square and the other kids said I was out. I wasn't out but I decided not to fight and I went out to love.

**Nicole**
**8 years old**

One day we had company, and one of my friends hit my head by accident with a croquet mallet, so I went upstairs to my room until they left, so no one would notice. I didn't want my friend to get in trouble for the lump on my head. I wanted to love Jesus in him.

**John Henry**
**8 years old**

One day my grandmother said that I should clean my room. I instantly thought of all the other things I could do, like finish my school work, play or read. But then I remembered that I should love my grandmother. I fixed my bed and straightened things up to love her.

**Christine**
**13 years old**

My mom woke me up really late one day but I was still tired. Then she wanted me to make my bed. I didn't feel like making it but I did anyway out of love.

**Scottie**
**10 years old**

# What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

## FOCOLARE ADDRESSES IN NORTH AMERICA

NEW YORK:
P.O. Box 496
New York, NY 10021

CHICAGO:
P.O. Box 53426
Chicago, IL 60653

SAN ANTONIO:
P.O. Box 32302
San Antonio, TX 78216

LOS ANGELES:
P.O. Box 71701
Los Angeles, CA 90071

BOSTON:
P.O. Box 239
Roslindale, MA 02131

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